

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BERLIN 01224

LONDON FOR USIA DEPUTY ASSISTANT DIRECTOR ARNOLD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SCUL, GE, US

SUBJECT: AMERICAN FILM WEEK

REF: USIA 3767

SUMMARY: IN HOUR-LONG SESSION AT MFA ON STATUS OF AMERICAN FILM WEEK, DR. BETTIN MADE NO CONCESSIONS ON PROBLEM OF OBJECTIONABLE TITLE, INSISTED ON GDR RICHT TO SELECT FILMS TO BE SHOWN AND MADE LIGHT OF CONCERN OVER PRINT CONTROL. ADMITTING THAT HE HAD HAD NO WORD FOR OVER SIX WEEKS ON MATTER OF TITLE, BETTIN SEEMED UNPERTURBED WHEN TOLD THAT IN ABSENCE ACCEPTABLE TITLE, U.S. CANCELLING FILM WEEK PROJECT. EMBASSY PREPARED TO INFORM MFA. END SUMMARY.

1. DR. BETTIN AND FRAU ELM OF MFA'S CULTURAL DEPARTMENT RECEIVED PAO ON FEB. 15 AT HIS REQUEST TO DISCUSS STATUS OF AMERICAN FILM WEEK. PAO BEGAN WITH BRIEF REVIEW OF FEBRUARY 6 MEETING AT MINISTRY OF CULTURE
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AFTER BETTIN ADMITTED HE UNINFORMED OF SUBSTANCE THAT MEETING. PAO EXPRESSED DISAPPOINTMENT AND CONCERN THAT MFA HAD BEEN UNABLE PROVIDE ANY REPLY TO QUESTION OF CHANGE IN FILM WEEK TITLE SINCE NOVEMBER 29 AS THOUGH PROBLEM NEVER EXISTED; THAT IN ABSENCE OF ANY CHANGE, REALIZATION OF PROJECT DUBIOUS; AND THAT IF NO CHANGE CONTEMPLATED, BERLIN PROJECT WOULD BE CANCELLED,

AS WOULD FILM WEEKS IN OTHER CITIES PROPOSED BY MINCULT.
CONCLUDING ON MATTER OF TITLE, PAO EXPRESSED REGRET
THAT GDR SOUGHT TO POLITICIZE WHAT BY ANY STANDARDS
COULD BE CONSIDERED A PURELY CULTURAL EVENT.

2. AT THIS POINT, BETTIN WAS ASKED IF HE WISHED TO
RESPOND, COMMENT OR REPORT ANY CHANGE IN THE TITLE. BETTIN
SAID HE FIRST WANTED TO HEAR ALL POINTS TO BE MADE, AFTER
WHICH HE WOULD RESPOND.

3. CONTINUING, PAO EXPLAINED PROBLEM OF MPAA
REQUIREMENT OF EMBASSY CONTROL OVER ALL PRINTS, THAT
THEREFORE MINCULT REQUEST FOR RETENTION OF PRINTS SIX
WEEKS IN ADVANCE IMPOSSIBLE TO FILL, JUST AS
SIMULTANEOUS SHOWINGS IN FOUR CITIES EQUALLY IMPOSSIBLE.

4. ON CONTENT OF FILM WEEK, PAO STRESSED THAT DECISION
WHICH FILMS TO SHOW WAS PRIMARILY OURS; THAT WE FAILED TO
UNDERSTAND OBJECTIONS TO ORIGINAL TWELVE SUBMISSIONS,
WITH POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF "ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S
NEXT," WHICH BECAUSE IT WOULD BE SHOWN SHORTLY IN GDR
COULD BE REPLACED WITH "NICKLEODEON," "AMERICAN
GRAFFITI" OR "SILENT MOVIE"; THAT OBJECTION TO "GONE WITH
THE WIND" WAS TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE SINCE WE WERE BEST
JUDGE OF WHAT FILMS REPRESENTED AMERICAN SOCIETY. (BETTIN
INTERRUPTED TO ASK NATURE OF OBJECTION, AND WHEN TOLD,
WITH ADDITIONAL REMINDER THAT HE HAD INITIALLY WELCOMED
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GWTW, HE MERELY SMILED.) CITING GEYER RATIONALE (LAST
YEAR TO CHARGE) FOR PREVIEWING FILMS, I.E., GUARANTEE
THAT NOTHING PORNOGRAPHIC OR ANTI-SOVIET BE INCLUDED, PAO
SAID US FULLY COGNIZANT OF GDR-USSR RELATIONSHIP AND NOT
SO UNWISE AS TO INCLUDE FLAGRANTLY PROVOCATIVE FILMS, AND
HAD EVEN DECIDED NOT TO PROPOSE "THE RUSSIANS ARE COMING"
BECAUSE OF ITS TITLE, ALTHOUGH (AS FRAU ELM, TAKING NOTES,
IMMEDIATELY CONFIRMED) IT WAS A HIGHLY DETENTE-ORIENTED
FILM. AS FOR GEYER'S FEAR OF PORNOGRAPHY, PAO SAID THE
ORIGINAL TWELVE TITLES HAD NOTHING OFFENSIVE, WHILE SOME
OF THE TITLES SUGGESTED BY THE MINCULT'S FILM CHIEF
CONTAINED SCENES WHICH COULD BE EMBARRASSING.

5. FINALLY, REGARDING RECIPROCITY, POINT WAS AGAIN
MADE ABOUT LIMITED INFLUENCE DEPARTMENT AND AGENCY COULD
WIELD IN ARRANGING GDR FILM WEEK IN US BUT THAT WITHIN
THESE LIMITS, EVERY EFFORT WOULD BE MADE. HOWEVER, US
SIDE COULD NOT PROVIDE POSTERS AND OTHER PUBLICITY IN US,
THEREFORE WOULD NOT REQUEST SAME OF GDR AND WOULD SUPPLY
ITS OWN IN EVENT US FILM WEEK DID AFTER ALL TAKE PLACE.

6. BETTIN BEGAN HIS RESPONSE WITH STATEMENT THAT SINCE

HIS REFERRAL OF BERLIN WEEK TITLE PROBLEM TO OTHER ELEMENTS OF MFA ON NOVEMBER 29, HE HAS HEARD NOTHING, NOR DID HE FIND FACT THAT MINCULT HAD NOT INFORMED MFA OF SUBSTANCE OF FEBRUARY 6 MEETING UNUSUAL. MINCULT FULLY AUTHORIZED DISCUSS PROJECT WITH EMBASSY, HE SAID, BUT HE DID WISH MAKE SOME GENERAL POINTS WHICH REMAIN ALWAYS BASIC. FIRST, GDR HAS LONG EXPERIENCE WITH FILM WEEKS AS ORGANIZED WITH "SOCIALIST STATES," AS WELL AS WITH WEST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES; THEREFORE, PRECEDENTS EXIST, AND HAVE

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FOR THIRTY YEARS. SECOND, FILM WEEKS ARE AGREED TO ONLY ON THE BASIS OF RECIPROCITY AND ACCORDING TO THE CONDITIONS OF THE HOST COUNTRY. THUS, IF WASHINGTON IS LIMITED IN THE INFLUENCE IT CAN EXERT BUT CAN INFORM RELEVANT ORGANIZATIONS AND GUARANTEE CONDITIONS SIMILAR TO THOSE IN THE GDR, WELL AND GOOD. THIRD, ALL FILM WEEKS ARE ORGANIZED FULLY AND EXCLUSIVELY BY GOVERNMENT OF GDR, FOR WHICH THE CULTURAL MINISTRY IS RESPONSIBLE AND HAS FULL AUTHORITY, THEREFORE, BETTIN SAID, MINCULT IS ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FILMS TO BE SELECTED, "ACCORDING TO THE CONDITIONS IN THE GDR, BECAUSE THE MINISTRY IS BEST INFORMED OF THOSE CONDITIONS."

7. PAO INTERRUPTED TO ASK POLITELY FOR MORE SPECIFICS, ADDING THAT SINCE A MAJOR CULTURAL EVENT WAS AT STAKE, BOTH SIDES SHOULD BE AS PRECISE AS POSSIBLE, AND THAT THE LAST STATEMENTS BY BETTIN WERE NOT CLEAR. BETTIN EXPLAINED THAT HE WAS REFERRING SPECIFICALLY TO THE FILM CONTENT OF THE US WEEK. "WE VIEW SUCH AN EVENT AS A MOVE

TOWARDS BETTER RELATIONS, AS THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE
CULTURAL-POLITICAL LIFE OF OUR COUNTRY, AND A MEANS OF
ENRICHING AND INFORMING THE PUBLIC OF THE GDR ABOUT
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OTHER COUNTRIES." PAO AGAIN ASKED BETTIN TO COME
SOMEWHAT CLOSER TO THE POINT AND PROVIDE MORE DIRECT
RESPONSE. FOR INSTANCE, WAS HE SUGGESTING THAT ONLY THE
GDR COULD DECIDE WHICH FILMS WOULD BE SHOWN? BETTIN SAID
YES, THAT WAS THE POINT HE WAS MAKING. "THE NEEDS OF
OUR PUBLIC AS REGARDS INFORMATION ON OTHER
COUNTRIES, INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES, ARE BEST
UNDERSTOOD BY US," HE SAID, "AND THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE."

8. CONCERNING THE CONTROL OF ALL PRINTS, BETTIN WENT ON,
HE UNDERSTOOD THE REASON BEHIND IT, NAMELY PIRACY
(VERFAELSCHUNG), AND SAID, MINIMIZING THE PROBLEM WITH A
LAUGH AND WAVE OF HAND, WHILE HE COULD UNDERSTAND THE
MPA'S CONCERN, NO ONE NEED FEAR SUCH AN ILLEGAL ACT ON
THE PART OF THE GDR. BETTIN STOPPED TALKING AND SAT BACK.

9. PAO LOOKED AT BOTH BETTIN AND ELM INCREDULOUSLY AND
ASKED IF THE FOREGOING REPRESENTED THE COMPLETE RESPONSE
TO THE POINTS RAISED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MEETING.
BETTIN SAID HE THOUGHT EVERYTHING HAD BEEN COVERED. BUT
WHAT ABOUT THE FILM WEEK TITLE, HE WAS ASKED? WHAT
ABOUT IT? BETTIN REPLIED, AND CONTINUED: THE FILM WEEK
IS ARRANGED BETWEEN TWO SOVEREIGN STATES, IN THIS CASE THE
USA AND THE GDR, THE CAPITAL OF WHICH IS BERLIN. HE THEN
ASKED TO HEAR THE SPECIFIC OBJECTION ONCE AGAIN, WHICH
WAS PATIENTLY DONE: AS HE WELL KNEW, THE U.S. DID NOT
RECOGNIZE BERLIN AS THE CAPITAL OF THE GDR BUT MERELY
AS THE SOVIET SECTOR OF GREATER BERLIN, THEREFORE THE
INCLUSION OF THE PHRASE "IN THE GDR" IN THE TITLE OF
OF OUR FILM WEEK WAS UNACCEPTABLE, AS IT WOULD BE FOR ANY
EVENT IN BERLIN.

10. NOW TENSE AND GRIM-FACED, BETTIN REPLIED THAT THIS US
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POSITION WAS WELL-KNOWN TO THE GDR, BUT THAT FOR THE GDR
THE QUESTION OF BERLIN WAS BASIC AND FUNDAMENTAL, AND
CONCLUDED, "THE STATUS OF BERLIN IS UNDISCUSSABLE
(INDISKUTABEL). REPORT THAT BACK TO WASHINGTON AND WE
SHALL AWAIT YOUR REPLY." PAO ADDRESSED FRAU ELM AND
ASKED IF SHE HAD RECORDED THE EARLIER POINTS HE HAD MADE,

NAMELY THAT IF THERE WAS TO BE NO CHANGE IN THE FILM WEEK TITLE, THE US WOULD CANCEL THE PROJECT. FRAU ELM TIMIDLY CONFIRMED THAT THE POINT HAD BEEN MADE, AND LOOKED AT BETTIN. IN SUDDEN CHANGE OF MOOD, HE THEN SUGGESTED BRIGHTLY THAT IF BERLIN WERE UNACCEPTABLE UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, WHY NOT ORGANIZE THE FILM WEEK IN LEIPZIG, ASKING--SARCASTICALLY--"OR DOESN'T YOUR GOVERNMENT CONSIDER LEIPZIG OR DRESDEN AS BEING IN THE GDR EITHER?" PAO REPLIED THAT THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS WERE ALSO IN FRAU ELM'S NOTEBOOK, AND THAT THERE DIDN'T SEEM TO BE ANYTHING FURTHER TO DISCUSS IF BETTIN COULD NOT PROMISE A RESPONSE FROM ANOTHER LEVEL, TO WHICH BETTIN OBLIQUELY REPLIED THAT THE OTHER LEVEL TO CONSIDER WAS THE FINAL ACT OF HELSINKI, AND THE ONE-HOUR SESSION ENDED. (ESCORTING HER VISITOR TO THE MAIN DOOR, FRAU ELM SAID IT WAS REGRETTABLE THAT "UNPLEASANT MATTERS" HAD TO COME UP IN OUR RELATIONS, AND THAT SHE OFTEN THOUGHT OF HER DAYS IN WASHINGTON, WHICH SHE AND HER HUSBAND JUST RE-LIVED BY SEEING "ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN" NOW PLAYING IN EAST BERLIN. WASHINGTON WAS WONDERFUL, SHE SAID SADLY.) 11. DURING FEBRUARY 16 COURTESY CALL ON MFA'S US DESK OFFICER ELM (HUSBAND OF BETTIN'S ASSISTANT", RICHARD BARKLEY, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF EUR/CE, RAISED QUESTION OF FILM WEEK AND U.S. CONCERN OVER TITLE AND CONTENT. ELM, ALTHOUGH CLAIMING NOT TO KNOW DETAILS, WAS CLEARLY AWARE

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OF PAO'S PRESENTATION TO BETTIN. ELM SAID HE HAD BEEN ASTONISHED TO KNOW ABOUT THE U.S. POSITION ON THE FILM WEEK, BUT MADE NO FURTHER SUBSTANTIVE COMMENT.

12: COMMENT: THE MUTUAL TESTING POSITIONS APPEAR NOW TO BE FINAL, AND SINCE NEITHER SIDE IS BUDGING FROM ITS POSITION ON THE ISSUE OF THE FILM WEEK TITLE, THE ENTIRE PROJECT APPEARS DEAD. THE GDR HAS TAKEN NO CONCILIATORY STEPS TOWARDS MEETING US EVEN PART-WAY AND HAS ASSUMED AN INFLEXIBLE POSTURE. ON THE THREE MAIN PROBLEMS -- TITLE, CONTENT AND CONTROL -- BETTIN HAS TAKEN THE POSITION THAT THE STATUS OF BERLIN CANNOT BE DISCUSSED AND THEREFORE THE TITLE REMAINS UNCHANGED (PARA 10), THAT THE GDR AND NOT THE U.S. WILL DECIDE WHICH FILMS SHALL BE SHOWN (PARA 7), AND THAT IN THE MATTER OF U.S. CONTROL OF PRINTS, FEAR OF PIRACY IN THE GDR (PARA 8), IS UNFOUNDED. IF THE GDR, THROUGH ITS WASHINGTON EMBASSY, SUCCEEDS IN PRIVATELY ARRANGING WITH THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART IN NEW YORK FOR ANOTHER GDR FILM FESTIVAL, THEN IT WILL HAVE ACHIEVED ITS AIM WITHOUT ANY ELEMENT OF RECIPROCITY, WHICH COULD EXPLAIN THE APPARENT LACK OF CONCERN AND SIX-WEEK INACTION BY
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THE MFA TO OUR NOVEMBER 29 PRESENTATION.

13. UNLESS INSTRUCTED OTHERWISE AFTER USIA/DEPT DISCUSS ISSUE WITH AMBASSADOR BOLEN, EMBASSY WILL INFORM MFA BY LETTER, CONFORMING TO USUAL PAO-BETTIN CHANNEL OF CORRESPONDENCE, THAT SINCE GDR UNABLE MEET U.S. REQUIREMENTS BY GUARANTEEING MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE CONDITIONS FOR OFFICIALLY-SPONSORED SHOWING OF AMERICAN FILMS IN BERLIN, U.S. DECLINES PARTICIPATE IN FILM WEEK PROJECT. POLANSKY

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